DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 160 121 IR 006 568

AUTHOR Gutman, Nancy
TITLE Collection Organization in a Mathematical Research Library.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Special Libraries Association (Kansas City, Missouri, June 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Books; *Library Collections; *Mathematics; *Organization; Periodicals; Reference Books; Reports; *Research Libraries
IDENTIFIERS New York University

ABSTRACT

The Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences Library at New York University, with a collection of 30,000 books, 13,000 bound periodicals, 450 current periodical subscriptions, and miscellaneous reports, documents, and reprints, shelves books alphabetically by author, and journals alphabetically by title. Conference proceedings and lecture notes are integrated with the book collection using the editor as the main entry, and shelving each series together by title. As a further aid for patrons with incomplete information about proceedings, the library has added a catalog entry for the geographical location of each conference; this system is helpful since most users know the conference location. Reference books are shelved separately by category, research reports are filed alphabetically by issuing agency, and reprints from periodicals of marginal interest not received through subscription are bound and indexed by author. These arrangements seem to serve the specialized patrons best. (MBR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED160121

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Collection Organization in a Mathematical Research Library

Nancy Gubman

New York University
Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences
251 Mercer Street
New York, New York 10012

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Nancy Gubman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

IR006568

Collection Organization in a Mathematical Research Library

Nancy Gubman

New York University, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences,

New York, New York 10012

The library at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences (CIMS) at New York University contains a collection of 30,000 books, 13,000 bound periodicals, and about 450 current periodical subscriptions, as well as miscellaneous reports, documents, and reprints. Material is collected for graduate students and researchers in all aspects of mathematics, in computer science, and in mathematical physics.

Shelving of Monographs

When Richard Courant came to NYU from Germany in the 1930's, he and some other mathematicians wanted the books to be shelved alphabetically by author as they had been in Göttingen. Journals were to be shelved alphabetically by title. The mathematicians felt that researchers needed access to the literature by author and that subject browsing among the books was unnecessary.

We have found that the majority of requests deal with locating specific books and papers rather than subject searches. When a book is involved, the user can go directly to the shelf and not spend time at the catalog looking up the call number. In a highly specialized library such as the one at the Courant Institute, the arrangement of books by subject can be misleading, expecially to new students. Many monographs treat a number of specific topics yet the book can be shelved in only one place. Any number of subject entries can be placed in the catalog. For anyone needing material in a subject with which he or she is unfamiliar, the card catalog is a necessary

stopping-place for finding relevant information. The response to alphabetical shelving has always been overwhelmingly affirmative.

Occasionally beginning graduate students have voiced some opposition to this system. Since they are unfamiliar with the literature, they often need to browse through subject entries in the catalog. In addition to the card catalog, people interested in new fields are advised to look at the reserve book listings which are posted according to course titles. This has proved to be an invaluable aid, as the books on reserve are most often the standard works on a given subject.

Although the collection is still shelved alphabetically by main entry, some changes have been made during the last five years in response to the growing size of the library and to changing needs of the users. Originally, conference proceedings and lecture notes were shelved in spearate sections. This meant that original lecture notes and later revised versions in book form were not shelved together. In addition, many users were unclear as to the distinction between a book and notes. It was necessary for them to check the catalog to see if the card was marked "Lectures" or "Conference" and then proceed to the appropriate section. The advantage to alphabetical shelving was lost in these instances. Two years ago the conferences and lecture notes were integrated into the book collection. This has eliminated many shelving errors and has made it easier for users to find books.

Locating Conference Proceedings

The proceedings of conferences present additional problems. First, there is the question of main entry. In most cases, the Library of Congress uses the title. Since so many titles begin with "Conference on... or "Symposium on...", use of the LC main entry would make it difficult both for the shelvers and the users. At the CIMS library we generally use the editor as

the main entry to alleviate the above problem. Series of conferences, such as Symposia in Pure Mathematics, are shelved together by title.

A second problem which has always been present at the CIMS library is locating the conference proceedings on the shelf. Few mathematicians are aware of the editor. They are also often vague about the subject and have the date within a few years. A typical request is, "There was a conference in Las Vegas a few years ago. I need a paper by John Brown which was given there." Or, "I'd like to see the proceedings of the conference on computer science which was held in Miami last year." These questions can sometimes be answered by searching through the subject entries in the catalog, however, the questions are often too vague to do so. Five years ago, we began to add an entry into the catalog for the place where the conference was held. This was done for all of our conference holdings as well as for new acquisitions. The place cards are filed separately from the other cards and are in alphabetical order by country, state, and city or university. We have found this system to be successful, as we can take the user to the catalog and have him or her look through the cards listed under where the conference was held. If the library owns a copy of the title, the user will almost always recognize it and happily go off to the shelves to get the book.

Miscellaneous Groupings

Reference books, which do not circulate, are shelved separately and are grouped together by category, such as dictionary, directory, bibliography, etc. Mathematical tables occupy one stack at the end of the book section and computer manuals occupy a separate bookcase near the circulation desk. We have found that browsing among the books is done in these areas and have made them physically accessible for this. The respective catalog cards are marked with the location.

Research Reports and Reprints

The CIMS library collects research reports in mathematics and computer science which are issued by universities, corporations, and some governmental agencies. They are filed alphabetically by issuing agency or institution and are then arranged in order of the report number or chronologically within the series. New reports are left on the open shelves near the current periodicals. Twice a year, reports which have not been used or are of no interest to the students and faculty are weeded out. Those documents which are kept are stored in file cabinets. We keep a list of agencies and institutions whose research reports we generally retain. When a document is requested, any member of the library staff can go to the files and find the desired report.

The CIMS library also collects reprints of articles which appear in periodicals which are not in the library's collection. These articles are acquired either as donations or at the request of a user. Most of the research at the Courant Institute is done in applied mathematics. Due to budgetary and space considerations we cannot subscribe to all journals of marginal interest. The majority of user requests for items not in the CIMS library are in the fields of physics, engineering, biology, and the geosciences.

Donations are viewed with mixed feelings. The library regularly receives reports and reprints from faculty members when they clean up their offices. We accept these gifts with the understanding that we may discard unwanted material. At other times, we have received mathematicians' entire collections of reprints. Richard Courant and Harald Bohr each gave his collection of reprints of articles by various mathematicians to the library.

Each set was bound and an author index on cards was produced. There are approximately 300 volumes in each set.

When K.O. Friedrichs donated his collection of reprints to the library last year, it was decided that a new series of reprints would be started and that all future acquisitions would be added to this series. Eighty bound volumes resulted and an author index is in preparation. As the library acquires more reprints, they will be bound and indexed.

Conclusion

When evaluating the physical organization of the material in the CIMS library, we have always tried to keep in mind the needs of the users. At times, we have been pressured by the central NYU library to change over to LC classification of books. Experience has shown that researchers at the Courant Institute work in a specific area of mathematics. They request material which they have seen cited in papers and books or which they have heard about in seminars and from colleagues. The fact that we are serving a mathematically sophisticated group of people has influenced our decision to continue the alphabetical shelving of books and periodicals.